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## MOSES ORDWAY, PIONEER PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY

THOMAS S. JOHNSON

Moses Ordway, son of Trustum Ordway, was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, December 27, 1788. His parents were poor in this world's goods and it is said that when Moses was a boy they owned nothing but an ax, a log chain, and a yoke of steers. His mother was a member of the Presbyterian Church; his father was a Baptist. The former taught him the catechism and the Christian duties; the latter taught him practical tasks—how to work the land, and to make good use of his powers. There was no school in the neighborhood that he could attend until he was twelve years of age, so he worked for his parents and developed a taste for mechanics. Seeing his bent his father hired him to the village blacksmith for one year, to a carpenter and builder for another; then he was apprenticed for a year to a wagon maker, and after that he worked in a cotton factory.

About this time he fell and broke his shoulder, which turned his attention to the medical profession. Thereupon he studied medicine two years with a local doctor, after which he began to practice. A great revival of religion soon occurred in his village; young Ordway was converted, had a vision of the world of indifference and sin, and resolved to become a preacher. His father was bitterly opposed to this course and wished him to continue his medical practice. His mother said, "Let us pray for guidance and help our boy to go to college." The father replied, "I cannot help." So the young man determined to make his own way, and entered Middlebury College. After graduation from that institution Mr. Ordway studied with the minister at Hillsboro, in preparation for the ministry, and in 1822 was licensed to



**MOSES ORDWAY**

**From a photograph in the Wisconsin Historical Library**

preach by the Congregational Association of that place. His first charges were in newly-settled regions in Vermont, where he went from one place to another on foot or on horseback, and later in a chaise made by his own hands. In his journal of that period he says:

I always preached three and sometimes four times on the Sabbath and visited families and held meetings in houses during the week. I had good congregations but no souls were converted. I was ashamed and began to look at my promise to God that if he would put me into the ministry I would be an apostle and a revival minister without regard to pay and gather souls to Christ. These were my views at the outset but in getting my education I had forgotten. I repented and determined to reform my life. I resolved to seek a new field and late in the fall of 1823 I started out for St. Lawrence County, New York, and began a work for revival at Norfolk with good results. In the spring of 1824 I was ordained as an evangelist by St. Lawrence Presbytery. God wonderfully blessed my work and opened out my way. A few weeks before I went to Norfolk three pious women met to pray in secret from eleven to twelve each day for a minister and for the church. When I came to the place one of the principal men asked me to preach. I simply said, "You have sent off your good old minister and I conclude that you do not want a minister or any more preaching." But he said they did. I proposed that if the little church of eighteen or twenty members would all come together one week from that day I would be with them. "Agreed," said the elder, but I said to him, "We cannot do anything unless they are all there, both men and women, and this must be a private meeting for the members alone. One week from that time they were all there and the work had already begun. They were tender in feeling, thoroughly convicted, and I did not have to spend days in convincing them that their salvation came out of Zion and that sinners were converted by the sovereign grace of God. They understood that they must ask God to do the work, and God would honor their prayers. In this revival there were forty members added to the church.

Soon after this Reverend Ordway went to assist the minister at Warsaw, New York, in revival meetings, and labored with gracious results as a Presbyterian missionary in the great revivals of the day, in Steuben County and afterwards in Genesee and Monroe counties. To continue his own account, he writes:

On my way home from my revival meetings, in the early part of 1836, I was violently taken with the Wisconsin fever. Hearing about the opportunities for missionary work in that wonderful new world that was opening up so grandly I concluded it would be wisdom to be in season and go there to do needed work in the new settlements. So I commenced preparations at once. I began to sell my property at Rochester and by the first of October, 1836, I was ready to go. We went on an old steamboat which only ran by day and in fourteen days reached Green Bay, Wisconsin. I went immediately to the garrison at Fort Howard and called on Dr. Satterlee, the surgeon, a good and wise man,<sup>1</sup> and made known to him my business. I met a man who had lived near my father and who in a fit of madness had killed his brother and had disappeared. I went across the river and talked with the people. There was a school house where the Episcopal people held a service on Sunday mornings and the Methodists in the afternoons.<sup>2</sup> Our people thought I should hold a meeting in the evening. I then informed them that I should not preach or be known in public until we had a meeting-place of our own. The idea pleased them and they soon purchased a large storehouse which was lately nearly finished. We completed the building and soon had a nice meetinghouse. While this was going on, I was privately looking up material to form a church. I found sixty people who had been professors before they came to Green Bay. Rev. Cutting Marsh,<sup>3</sup> the foreign missionary who was laboring among the Stock-

<sup>1</sup> Richard Smith Satterlee was a native of New York, who enlisted in the army from Michigan Territory and was commissioned, Feb. 25, 1822, assistant surgeon with the rank of lieutenant. Dr. Satterlee succeeded Dr. Foote as garrison surgeon at Fort Howard in Green Bay some time in the early thirties. He was very popular with both town and army people, and assisted in founding the first Presbyterian church in Wisconsin. About 1840 he was removed to another post, and continued in service until the Civil War, when he became chief medical purveyor for the federal army with the rank of lieutenant colonel. September 2, 1864, he was brevetted brigadier general and cited for honors because of "his diligent care and attention in procuring medical supplies, and for his economy and fidelity in disbursing large sums of money." February 22, 1869, he was retired from active service and died Nov. 10, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> A Protestant Episcopal church was begun at Green Bay in 1824, but no building was undertaken, and the organization was not completed until 1829 when Christ Church was incorporated by the territorial legislature of Michigan. "Services were held in the yellow schoolhouse on Cherry Street" until 1838 when the church building was completed.

The first Methodist services were held in Fort Howard garrison when Colonel Samuel Ryan was commandant. In 1832 New York Conference sent the Reverend John Clark as missionary to Wisconsin; he organized a class at Green Bay and in 1834 the Reverend George White was appointed pastor. Services were held in the schoolhouse in alternation with the Episcopalians until the Methodist church building was completed in the latter part of 1836. Deborah B. Martin, *History of Brown County* (Chicago, 1913), I, 256, 259.

<sup>3</sup> For a sketch of the Reverend Cutting Marsh and his work for the Stockbridge Indians see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XV, 25-38.

bridge Indians, had been here and looked up a few. We finally found nine who were willing to be formed into a Presbyterian Church and before our meetinghouse was finished the church was organized. Rev. Mr. Marsh and I formed the church which was the first Presbyterian Church in the territory of Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup>

At this time there were about four thousand inhabitants in Green Bay and they seemed to be agreed in only one thing and that was to blaspheme God and indulge in all kinds of wickedness. About every other night they would have a bonfire and by the help of a whiskey band would have a dance which was so wicked and so wild that many of both sexes would lie drunken on the ground the next morning.

My first discourse was on the subject of the carnal mind being at enmity against God. This was illustrated by the daily life of the people of Green Bay and went home to many hearts. This was on the last of November, 1836, and by the last of December we had gathered a blessed harvest of souls which brought up the membership to eighty. These were received into the church in January and February, 1837. This was a genuine work of grace and attended by many interesting circumstances. At this time I held a revival meeting at the Stockbridge Mission with the Rev. Cutting Marsh, where there were many conversions.<sup>5</sup> About the middle of February, 1837, I took Brother Marsh and we mounted our ponies and started for Milwaukee where we had a call to form a church, and after sleeping two or three nights on the snow we arrived safe in Milwaukee. Here we found a heterogeneous mass of about a hundred and fifty men and thirty women who seemed to take some interest in our work. We held meetings and visited among the people and the church was formed April 11, 1837.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Ordway remained a month or two in Milwaukee and preached to its pioneer residents. Meanwhile he went to Prairieville (now Waukesha) and took up a homestead claim where his family might live while he continued his

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Ordway would seem to indicate that there had been no Presbyterian organization at Green Bay previous to his arrival. There had been no settled pastor, but the Reverend Cutting Marsh in April, 1836, visited Fort Howard and Green Bay, and organized a small company to whom he preached several times before Mr. Ordway's arrival. Manuscript journals of Marsh in Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> See Marsh's account of this revival among the Indians in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XV, 159-60.

<sup>6</sup> Marsh's manuscript journal shows that the two ministers reached Milwaukee on March 17. He gives a detailed account of the church organization on April 11, 1837; Samuel Hinman, Samuel Brown, and John Ogden were elected elders; eighteen united in full membership.

missionary operations. On the last of May of this year he returned to New York and began preparations to remove to Wisconsin. He sold his possessions in the East and started west in a two-horse wagon with tools and a hired man to prepare his home and get it ready for his family, who soon followed him to the new territory. After he was settled Mr. Ordway preached in Prairieville for a season when the church secured the services of the Reverend S. Nichols,<sup>7</sup> and Mr. Ordway went out to preach in Troy and in other places in the newly settled regions of eastern Wisconsin. He says in the journal:

As I have reached a good old age, I have to say that God has provided well for me in my support during a ministry of fifty years. I have never come to any severe want and have never had what would be considered a full salary for a single year in my ministerial life. About two-thirds of the time I have received nothing at all from the new and young churches, and besides supporting my family have paid considerably for other ministers. At Waukesha, I preached about two years for nothing. Then, when they got Rev. Mr. Nichols, I paid fifty dollars toward his salary, and at the same time preached a year at West Troy for nothing. At Beaver Dam I preached more than three years without salary and built them a house of worship with little help. When they engaged Rev. Alexander Montgomery<sup>8</sup> for a year I paid fifty dollars towards his support and at the same time went to Fountain Prairie fifteen miles west and formed a church. Whenever my health allowed I was ready to go and hold meetings and preach the gospel and always found work to do and great success in winning souls.

I have in all my ministry never sought for an easy place where they could pay a large salary but on the contrary have always looked for a miserable place where no harm could be done. I would look for a place where the people were so poor, stupid, or heartless that they would not ask a minister to preach to them and would take pains to say that they would not be able to pay, as a gentle hint for you to let them alone.

<sup>7</sup> The Reverend Cyrus Nichols was a native of Reading, Massachusetts, where he was born in 1799. He graduated at Williams College, and studied theology at Auburn, New York. In 1836 he came West and preached at Kenosha and Racine; he was called to the Prairieville (Waukesha) charge, May 1, 1839, and remained one year. For forty years he was a missionary in this state. He died at his home in Racine, Feb. 10, 1883.

<sup>8</sup> The Reverend Alexander Montgomery came to the Beaver Dam church in October, 1845, and remained as stated supply until June 1, 1850.

In such a place I delighted to put my foot. But I never preached to them the love of Christ to harden them for a long siege but began with St. Paul's doctrines, and very soon there would be a new face on things. As soon as they were awake and God began to increase them and they began to want to pay me, I would open the door for some anxious minister, who was ready for work and I would go to another place. This has been the order of my ministry from first to last and I have had not a little comfort in my service.

If some of my ministerial friends think I have been a very worldly minister, doing little for the Lord and much for myself, there is some truth in this for I have done a large amount of manual labor but have made it all contribute to the glory of God and the upbuilding of his church. Take for example our life in Beaver Dam. When we came here it was a dense forest—no houses, no mills, no roads, and no fences. Only a few scattered people and not a rich man among them, but in a few years Grubville,<sup>9</sup> as it was called, became a very noted place with mills, churches, stores, and factories. But it cost much hard work and it is true that I had no small hand in it. I owned the first sawmill. Paul Brower<sup>10</sup> owned the land on which the present upper mill stands. He tried to build a sawmill but had no means and gave it up. He gave his claim to Mr. Goetschius<sup>11</sup> with a contract to build the mill, but he could not do it and gave it to David Drake,<sup>12</sup> who went at it with a will and got the timber cut and the dam partly made but got sick of it and wanted to sell, and I bought the property. The people needed a gristmill and I built one with two run of stones, with circle saws and turning works. I hired capable men and superintended the work and frequently put my own hands to the work.

Mr. Brower and I surveyed and located all of the roads in and out of Beaver Dam as they now run to Watertown, Waupun, Columbus, Fox Lake, Lowell, Horicon, and Fall River. We helped to build the pole bridges and other improvements without one cent of pay. We cleaned

<sup>9</sup> "Grubbing" was a pioneer term for cutting down small elm and basswood trees, the bark of which was fed to stock when pasturage was insufficient or lacking. The term "Grubville" is said to have been applied to Beaver Dam in its early days by envious neighbors who wished to belittle its attractions.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Brower was of Holland origin, but a native of New York and a veteran in the War of 1812. He came to Wisconsin from Jefferson County, New York, in company with his son, Jacob L. Brower, who was the pioneer settler of Dodge County.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Goetschius was a son-in-law of Paul Brower, who came to Wisconsin in his company. He located at Fox Lake in 1839, and in 1841 removed to Beaver Dam and became one of its pioneer settlers.

<sup>12</sup> David Drake in the spring of 1842 bought forty acres including the water power at Beaver Dam; the same autumn he sold his claim to Moses Ordway.



up the streets and plotted the lots and did what we could to promote the welfare of our city in the face of much criticism and many difficulties.

Mr. Ordway first came to Beaver Dam in the spring of 1842, and, as he relates, built a grist- and later a sawmill; he removed his family to this place in 1843. During all these early months he preached both at Beaver Dam and in all the settlements around. He soon formed at the village a Presbyterian church of eight members and a small Sabbath school of nine children—all the town afforded at that time. Early in April, 1844, he called upon the men of the place to build a good meetinghouse, 16 by 24 feet in size, which was completed in less than one week. He preached in Beaver Dam three years, and during that time there were two revivals and several additions to the membership of the church. He organized a church in Horicon, on the east side of Rolling Prairie, and also in Juneau. He says in his journal:

I formed a church at Lake Emily and preached there for a season and formed a church at Fox Lake. I went to Fountain Prairie<sup>13</sup> the first time right through the woods and not a marked tree for fourteen miles. There I held meetings. Soon the village of Columbus sprang up and a Presbyterian church was formed there with Rev. Mr. Rosenkrantz as pastor.<sup>14</sup>

My next effort was at Oxford 18 miles north of Portage.<sup>15</sup> Here I formed a Presbyterian church and preached to them a short season. Although only a few families were here we had quite a revival and 10 or 12 united with the church.

My health began to suffer from exposure and in October, 1855, I moved to Rockford, Illinois, and labored as a Presbyterian missionary at Middle Creek, Durand, Poplar Grove, and in many settlements in that vicinity with gracious results.

<sup>13</sup> Fountain Prairie is a township in southeastern Columbia County, which was first settled in 1843.

<sup>14</sup> The first settler on the site of Columbus came in 1849; the town grew rather slowly and the first religious organization was not completed until Jan. 26, 1850. The Reverend C. E. Rosenkrantz, who became the first pastor of the Presbyterian church at Columbus, affiliated in 1852 with the Fox River Presbytery. He remained in charge ten years, and died in 1860.

<sup>15</sup> Oxford is a town in western Marquette County, having a population somewhat less than one thousand.

When his youngest son, James, entered the federal army at the beginning of the Civil War, the father returned to Beaver Dam and in April, 1862, took up again the missionary work and assisted the ministers as Presbyterial missionary in this region. His soldier son was killed November 7, 1863, and although the family cares and business interests of the elder Ordway were pressing, he nevertheless visited his mission fields and was ever ready to conduct revival meetings and to help forward the work of the Lord. He had a passion for souls and gloried in the extension of the Kingdom. He was an earnest and fearless preacher of righteousness, unfolding the gospel plan of salvation with great clearness and power. The old settlers of Wisconsin never forgot the pungent sermons of this man of God, nor the kindly offices and friendly welcomes of this pioneer Presbyterial missionary in Wisconsin.

While Reverend Ordway was on a missionary tour to Cambria during the winter of 1869-70, he was suddenly prostrated by sickness and died January 24, 1870, in the eighty-second year of his age. On the following Sabbath morning a union funeral service was held in the First Presbyterian Church in Beaver Dam; burial was in Forest Home, Milwaukee, where his son, Hon. David S. Ordway, lived. The latter son and his sister, Mrs. Mary Goodman, of Beaver Dam, survived their father a few years. One grandson, Fred S. Goodman, has for many years been one of the national secretaries of the Young Men's Christian Association, and with his two sons is now in the army work of that organization in the soldier camps in the United States and France.